

Los Angeles archdiocese extending school year

Cardinal Roger Mahony announced last week that the Archdiocese of Los Angeles is extending the school year for Catholic elementary schools by 20 days.

The Tidings, official newspaper of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, has the story:

At a time when California public schools have fewer instructional days due to the state budget crisis, Catholic elementary schools in the archdiocese will be moving to an extended school year this fall, adding four weeks of instruction.



According to Kevin Baxter, archdiocesan superintendent of elementary schools, the plan as announced at a principals' meeting last week is for as many schools as possible to adopt a 200-day academic calendar for the 2011-12 school year, increasing instruction by approximately 20 days.

All of the archdiocese's 210 parish elementary schools, with an enrollment of 52,000 students, will be operating under the 200-day calendar by the 2012-13 school year. Local Catholic schools will retain flexibility in setting start and end dates for individual site calendars, though the academic year must conclude by June 30 each year.

The increase in the number of days will essentially add four weeks to the calendar, establishing an 11-month school year vs. the 10-month year currently maintained in alignment with California state requirements.

In 2009, due to the ongoing recession, the California legislature reduced the minimum number of days of schooling to 175 from the U.S. standard of a 180-day school year.

"The U.S. is kind of at the bottom with regard to length of the school year," Baxter pointed out. "A lot of countries — like Indonesia, Japan, China and Singapore —

have 220-230 days and they outperform us on international tests because we're really in the middle of the pack."

He noted that extending the academic calendar is a school reform idea that has been heralded for years, including recently by President Barack Obama.

"The relationship between more substantive, effective time in an academic setting and increased student performance is clear and the elementary schools in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles are responding to this critical national issue in order that our students grow up to be successful leaders in the global workforce," said Baxter.

Under the extended school year plan, elementary schools will have 200 academic days, plus three designated teacher development days and one day allocated for spiritual retreat. The 10 percent increase in instructional time will result in a 10 percent increase in salaries for staff. An increase in tuition cost is expected at most schools, although anticipated enrollment increases may offset the level of increase.

More here.